

# The Way Things Were

Each generation sees the world for the first time. Most Missourians, driving through the forested Ozarks, believe it was always like this, a more or less pristine wilderness. Visitors from surrounding farm states who tour Missouri are impressed with the large amount of unused land in trees or brush. Coming from states that are largely giant culture pans, with the hand of man clearly evident everywhere, Missouri must look like an untrammeled wilderness. But the Ozark region has been heavily used in the century and a half since European man began exploiting its resources. The Ozarks represent some of the most abused land anywhere on the continent, and its present condition is a tribute to the efforts of conservationists over the past fifty years.

Only a generation or two ago, the forested hills were largely denuded, the fragile soil gone from the rocky slopes, the streams choked with gravel. Old photographs in Carl Sauer's little book, *Geography of the Ozark Highlands of Missouri*, written in the 1920s, show largely bare hills. Only a few decades ago it wasn't unusual to see fields of rocks in the Ozarks, or acres upon acres of broomsedge, that indicator of worn-out land.

Today, fields of bare rocks are rare, and broomsedge has largely been replaced with improved pastures of fescue or other grazing plants. Wildfires are nowhere nearly as common as they were, and reforestation cloaks hills that were formerly cut, **goated** and burned.

Our ancestors were probably the most rapacious users of natural resources the world has ever known. They came into Missouri intent on exploiting it. It was a land to be used, even used up, if necessary. There was little thought of tomorrow.

The first Europeans were after minerals and furs. The earliest probably were *coureurs du bois*--"woods runners"-fiddlefooted wanderers with a pack of trinkets to trade to the Indians for furs. Later, as the fur trade be-

came better organized, the government licensed certain traders, who employed *voyageurs* to travel to the Indians and trade. The unlicensed *coureurs du bois* became outlaws, which deterred them not one bit.

A second group came, seeking minerals. Lead and salt were the first to be exploited. Slaves were brought in to work the lead mines, and the forests were cut over to use in smelting the lead or to evaporate the salt from mineral spring water. The area around the eastern Ozarks became honeycombed with mining operations. In 1818, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, geologist and ethnologist, wrote that one had to constantly be on the alert lest he fall into the pits made by miners, which were everywhere. The Ozarks already were being hard used.

Settlers followed the miners, and they cleared some of the woods for croplands and turned loose large numbers of pigs and cattle to forage in the rest. This pattern of European settlement and exploitation was to continue right up to modern times.

The forests were used for building materials or fuel, the wildlife exploited for its pelts or for food. A lot of wildlife was simply gunned down as targets. Throughout our history, we read of travelers shooting wildlife just for the fun of it. The fur traders going up the Missouri River shot down the elk, buffalo, deer and antelope along the banks, just to pass the time. The surviving wildlife learned to move back away from the river's edge.

Later, people crossing the Great Plains by train used to shoot into the buffalo herds, with no thought of retrieving the great beasts that were brought down. It was there, it was plentiful--shoot it.

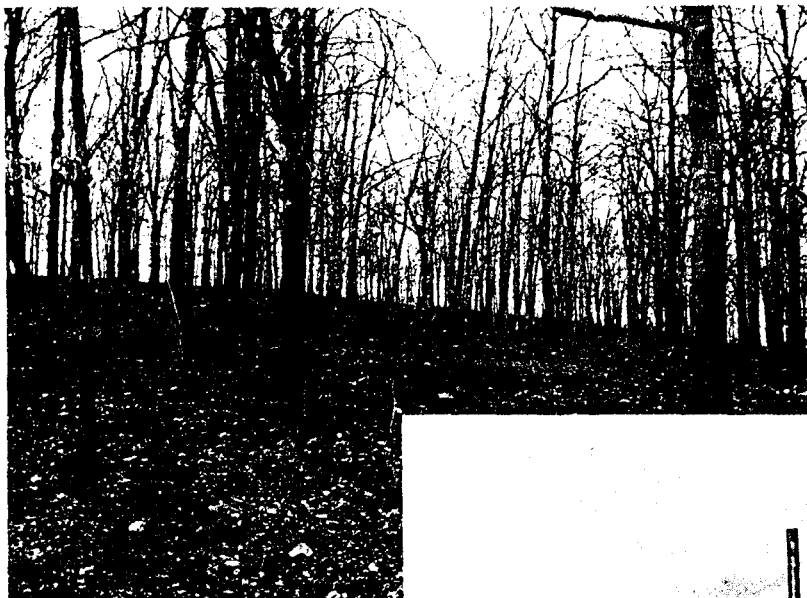
No voices were raised against such waste. Wildlife so abundant simply would last forever. Later, the government deliberately fostered wholesale destruction of the buffalo as a way of controlling the wandering Indian. The settler killed off the larger wildlife--buf-

falo, elk, cougar or bear-because it preyed on or competed with his livestock. Small creatures-Carolina paroquets, passenger pigeons or furbearers-went simply because they were a nuisance, or as products to market, but often because their habitat was so altered they could no longer exist.

Even before European man, the Indian had exploited the forests and prairies for his own purposes. Le Page du Pratz, a physician and chronicler of the southern Mississippi, traveling from Natchez to the mining region of our eastern Ozarks in the early 1700s, described the annual burning of the land by the Indians as a means of improving conditions for game. The Indian also used fire to drive game to its destruction. As the Indian obtained traps and guns, his exploitation of

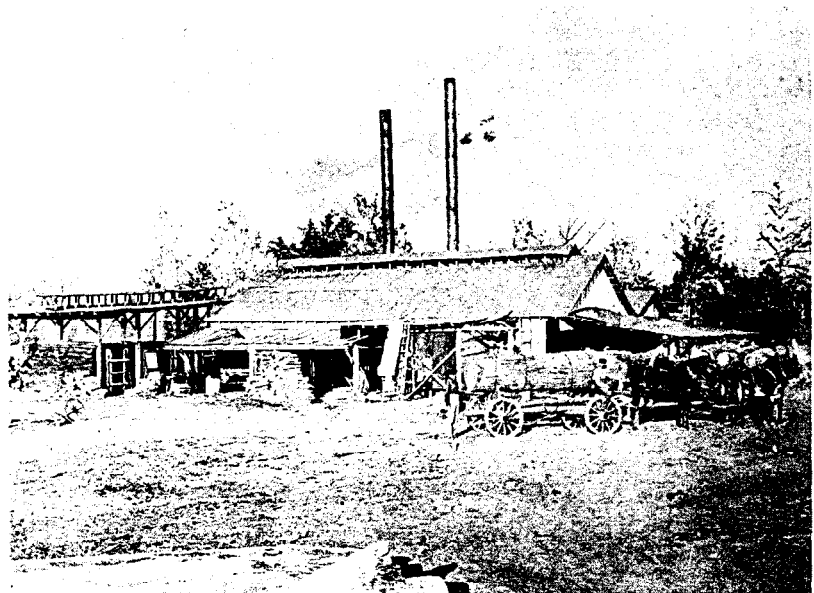
wildlife for trade to the white man markedly increased. Only the relatively low numbers of the Indian prevented him from being as destructive as the white man.

Southeast Missouri once supported a large Indian population that practiced extensive cultivation that greatly altered the environment. East Prairie and West Prairie of historic times were remnants of old fields that had been cleared, burned and cultivated by the Indians. These red men had largely disappeared before European man settled along the fringe of swampy southeast Missouri, and much of that area managed to escape exploitation until early in this century. Then lumber companies moved in and cut the great swamp forests, drained the swamps and created a seven-county billiard-table landscape that was



*The Ozarks forests in 1937 showed what 100 years of cutting, burning and grazing had done. The trees were of low quality, many of them fire-scarred, and the rocky soil was exposed everywhere.*

*The forests of Missouri's Bootheel region were the last to be exploited, but the pattern of exploitation was the same as other regions. The forests were high-graded and the wildlife hunted almost to extinction. This 1902 photo shows the Worst, Sherman & Brinkerhoff Stave Mill near Hayti and some of the large logs.*



inimical to wildlife. Much of southeast Missouri shows the hand of man as heavily as the great cornbelt farm regions of Illinois and Iowa.

Huge tracts of Missouri forests were cut over for railroad ties, and for a few years tie-raftering became a way of life for some Ozarkers. The trees were cut, the ties hacked out and dragged to some river's edge. There they were formed into rafts and floated to collection points, the rafters living aboard the raft as it floated downstream. They walked back from the collection points and began a new round of exploitation. Steamboats and early railroads demanded huge amounts of wood for fuel. Growing towns, likewise, demanded wood for building, heating, cooking and other purposes.

The interior Ozarks-the Current River country and its tributaries-was about the last area settled. It was so remote, so difficult to get to and so poor that it attracted only the loners interested in subsistence farming augmented by hunting and trapping. Settlers eked out an existence, running pigs and cows in the woods and scratching out grain fields along the narrow river bottoms. Burning the woods each spring, to keep the snakes and ticks down and improve the grass, was a standard practice. Here, too, the lumber barons eventually came, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and at one time Grandin boasted the largest sawmill in the world.

Mining and timber exploitation went hand in hand. In the early 1800s, Maramec Spring was the site of an early iron smelting



*This turn-of-the-century group of rabbit hunters wasn't bothered by any regulations.*

operation. The surrounding forest was cut off and made into charcoal. The business failed when it could not compete with newer smelting processes developed in the east.

During World War I, Carter County saw its hills stripped of timber for a charcoal/iron-ore smelting process at Midco, now a ruin that is difficult to find in the reforested area. The population of the county surged and then fell off, as the resources gave out. The Midco story is typical of the boom-and-bust exploitation of the Ozarks.

All over the state wildlife was exploited by market gunners who sent wagonloads of game to city markets. So politically powerful were these market gunners that they successfully fought off attempts to limit their activities well into this century.

By 1933, wildlife was at a generally low ebb. Sportsmen, especially, were beginning to feel increasing concern about its future. In 1934, University of Missouri zoology professor Dr. Rudolf Bennitt, and colleague and former student Werner O. Nagel, began their landmark wildlife survey.<sup>1</sup> They reported that fewer than one hundred ruffed grouse remained in the state. Deer numbers were estimated at not more than 2,000 animals, with perhaps 3,500 wild turkeys scattered across forty-five counties. Quail and rabbits were decreasing, as were raccoons, muskrats and mink. The only species they felt might be increasing were beaver, whose population was estimated at seventy-five to one hundred animals, and mourning doves.

Bennitt and Nagel did not concern them-



*In 1910 the Raithel Meat Market on High Street in Jefferson City offered deer and bear to its customers. Also visible are two bobcats, some rabbits and a weasel. Shortly after this date such commercialization in wildlife declined as laws began to be better enforced.*

<sup>1</sup> A Survey of the Resident Game and Furbearers of Missouri, by Rudolf Bennitt and Werner O. Nagel, University of Missouri Studies, Volume XII, Number 2, April 1, 1937.

selves with fish in their study, but streams had been debased by erosion following lumbering and wildfires, and fish life was in as precarious a position as land species. Just ahead were several years of drought that would further reduce wildlife and play havoc with the abused forests. But conditions were coming together to set the stage for a conservation comeback.

The Democratic landslide of 1932 which brought Franklin D. Roosevelt into the White House also brought significant changes in Missouri's political scene. Guy B. Park, Democrat, took over from Republican Governor Henry S. Caulfield. Governor Park replaced the Republican commissioner of game and fish, John H. Ross, with Democrat Wilbur C. Buford, a St. Louis lawyer from an old Ozark family long active in politics.

At the end of his first year, 1933, Buford summarized the conservation activities of his administration, beginning with the report that there had been a *complete* turnover of Department personnel. It was a prime example of the old spoils system, when one administration replaced another.

Buford reported that following twenty-three years of pheasant release failures, game farms were to be abandoned. Trout-hatchery production was to be cut back and emphasis

placed on warm-water species for stocking. The legislature had recently adopted length limits on many fish species, which were hailed by the Department as an advance in fisheries management.



*Wilbur C. Buford was last political director.*



*Drainage of swamps in southeast Missouri in the early 1900s speeded cutting of forests.*

One effect of the Great Depression was a three-year decline in income for the Fish and Game Department, from \$365,163 in 1930 to a low of \$266,390 in 1933, the year Buford began his term. But the Depression motivated the federal government to spend considerable sums for conservation through various public works programs for the unemployed.

Scarcity of water, owing to the drought, made the waterfowl season the most unfavorable in history. Fishermen, because of heat and low stream conditions, reported poor luck despite heavy stocking. The legal deer kill during a three-day season in seventeen south-Missouri counties totaled sixty-eight.

Thoughtful and concerned sportsmen all over the state were voicing their displeasure with political game and fish management. Typical of these were the words of dental surgeon Hale W. DeJarnatt of Centralia, written to Attorney General Roy McKittrick, February 9, 1934:

"I am a sportsman and interested in the future welfare of our game, fish and birds. Quoting one of your [McKittrick's] statements, that the Republicans spent during the last eight years some \$2,613,695.32 of the sportsmen's money, mostly for salaries and propaganda, only the small amount of about \$80,000 for replenishing the game of our state. We cannot forget these depredations.

What concerns we Democrats and sportsmen is what the Democrats are going to do while they are in power. . . .

"I call your attention to the irregularities relating to the salaries in the Game and Fish Department . . . . I question the right of the Department to acquire a foot of ground that cannot be used in the interest of the sportsmen as a hatchery, refuge or propagating of game. I question the right of the Department to acquire or purchase at the expense of sportsmen these recreation parks and historic sites. It is an injustice to spend their license money for historic and recreation places.

The sportsman's tolerance is nearing the breaking point. I look for, in fact I am reliably informed there will be a petition asking

for a referendum placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot the next election. The amendment will relate to the Game and Fish Department and will ask for a bi-partisan commission of four members and a law similar to Pennsylvania's efficient law. By the help of the American Legion, the Izaak Walton League, the horde of sportsmen and lovers of the great out-of-doors, I am confident this amendment will **carry**."<sup>2</sup>

In 1935, Missouri was in the grips of one of the most severe droughts in recorded history. Even though 1935 was not as dry nor as hot as the previous year, by mid-summer the mercury climbed above normal highs. Rivers and streams were either dried up or reduced to trickles. Even in the summer months, a smoke pall hovered over the Ozark hills, as wildfires raced virtually unchecked through parched vegetation.

It was the sixth year of the Great Depression, and the minds of Missourians, when they weren't worrying about jobs, the heat or drouth, were occupied with the Lindbergh murder trial, the assassination of Senator Huey P. Long, and impending war as Benito Mussolini massed men, tanks and planes on the Ethiopian border. Joe Louis knocked out Max Baer in the fourth round of their championship fight. Alabama's passing attack beat Stanford in the Rose Bowl. At the movies, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers starred in *Top Hat*.

Senator Huey Long's body was lying-in-state in the Louisiana capitol at Baton Rouge on Tuesday, September 10, 1935, when sportsmen and conservationists from all over Missouri met in a hotel at Columbia and formed the Restoration and Conservation Federation of Missouri.

They elected E. Sydney Stephens, Columbia publisher, as president and authorized him to form a committee to draft a constitution and by-laws for the organization. The organization was to have thirteen directors, one for each congressional district in the state.

Roland Hoerr of St. Louis was elected vice-president and John P. Gass of Springfield, secretary.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that DeJarnatt was aware of a constitutional amendment affecting conservation many months before it was adopted in September, 1935.

# WOULD RESTORE STATE'S WILD LIFE

Move to Create Non-Partisan Game and Fish Commission

MEETING HELD HERE

E. Sydney Stephens Elected Head of Newly Formed Federation

Sportsmen and other conservationists representing organizations in every section of Missouri joined here yesterday in the organization of the Restoration and Conservation Federation of Missouri which will launch an immediate campaign for restoration and conservation of bird life, fish, game forests and all other wild life resources of Missouri, and will sponsor a movement for creation by constitutional amendment of a non-partisan commission of four to administer the state's restoration and conservation program.

The amendment will be submitted to the voters in the 1936 general election upon initiative petition which will be circulated soon by the federation.

E. Sydney Stephens of Columbia was elected president of federation at yesterday's session, and provisions were made for other officers to be elected at a future date. Stephens was empowered to name a committee of four which will draft the constitution and by laws of the federation, and will name a board of directors of 15: one representing each congressional district in the state. The committee will write the proposed constitutional amendment, and will set up the organization which will circulate the initiative petition and organize the campaign on behalf of the amendment.

Nearly 100 representatives of various organizations, including several from St. Louis and Kansas City, attended yesterday's organization session.

Stephens emphasized that the purpose of the new organization was not only to protect the state's present resources, but to restore as far as possible those that have been lost.

He declared that the group had no criticism for the present administration of the state game and fish department. Rather the meeting had commendation for the present commissioner's administration.

he said, "but he like all other commissioners who have preceded him have been handicapped by the lack of permanence in his organization. It is the system that is at fault, not the man." *the Columbia Tribune described the political fish and game department.*



St. Louis businessman Roland M. Hoerr, above, originated the movement. Sedalia attorney J. T. Montgomery, right, broadened the vision of those attending the meeting.



Stephens was empowered to appoint a committee to draft a constitutional amendment that would form a four-man, non-partisan commission to restore Missouri's wildlife and forests. The amendment would be circulated by initiative petition and submitted to the voters at the 1936 general election.

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But he, like all other commissioners who have preceded him, has been handicapped by the lack of permanence in his organization. It is the system that is at fault, not the man.

With constantly changing direction and

personnel, Stephens continued, it has been impossible to make proper advancement in conservation, propagation and restoration of natural resources. The proposed amendment, he added, will provide a four-member, non-partisan commission, each member serving six years, and with terms so staggered that not more than two will expire in any one four-year state administration.

It would appear from his detailed account that Stephens already had in his pocket the proposed constitutional amendment:

We know that the amendment was drafted around the philosophy expounded by Sedalia attorney J. T. Montgomery, known affectionately as Uncle Mon. According to Stephens, it was Montgomery who told the group that it should concern itself with songbirds as well as game creatures and should embrace forestry, which was non-existent in Missouri except for the fledgling U. S. Forest Service. He broadened the vision of the assembled group, interested mostly in animals to hunt and fish to catch, pointing out that their efforts should include the interests of all citizens in the wildlife of the state, that they would need this broad support if their efforts were to succeed.

Charles Callison has written vividly about all the machinations that went on before the meeting in Columbia in his book, *Man and Wildlife in Missouri*. Roland M. Hoerr, St. Louis industrialist and sportsman, then president of the Missouri Duck Hunters Association, had started the ball rolling by writing to Memphis writer Nash Buckingham. He asked him how Tennessee had created a commission form of wildlife administration, and if he would be willing to help Missouri do so.

Callison told how Buckingham had toured the state, sounding out various sportsmen's group leaders and soliciting their support for a statewide organization that would take Missouri wildlife out of politics. These sportsmen from St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, Joplin and Hannibal had concluded that the best man to head such a group should come from out-state Missouri, as an organization headed by St. Louisans or Kansas Citians would be suspect by the rural sportsmen. At a meeting in July or August 1935, they had asked Sydney Stephens if he would be willing to serve as president, and he had agreed.



*Famed author Nash Buckingham, at Roland Hoerr's request, visited Missouri sportsmen's clubs to determine if they would back an effort to create a non-political fish and game department. He reported sportsmen were ready to support anything that might improve wildlife conditions.*

When the group actually convened at Columbia that September day in 1935, the groundwork was laid for the future course of events.

According to Callison, the group had at first been willing to make one more legislative attempt to improve wildlife conditions, but Stephens had urged a constitutional amendment.

If you get a law passed, what have you got? he argued to the assembled conservationists. The next legislature could repeal or amend it, and the politicians take over. By the same token, if you attempt to get a constitutional amendment through the legislature, you won't recognize it when it comes out.



But if you write the basic authority exactly as you want it, put it on the ballot through the initiative and let the people vote it into the constitution-then you've got something permanent!

Stephens' views convinced the group that it would be wasting time to make another legislative attempt, and to go instead for the constitutional amendment via the initiative petition.

One wonders if the nearly one hundred sportsmen assembled were aware that they were making conservation history as they launched their new organization. We don't even know the names, except for a handful of the leaders, of those who gathered that late summer day in Columbia. But they launched a chain of events that no other state had ever done before or since. It was a conservation milestone.

A number of elements came together at once that made conditions right for a bold step forward in conservation. The Depression had spawned a host of conservation programs, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought meaningful work for the vast army of unemployed. Conservation was in the air.

The U. S. Forest Service had only recently come into the state, buying up lands to create national forests. It had begun efforts to control the wildfires that swept the state each spring and fall, and was beginning some rudimentary wildlife management on the new national forest lands.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which took young men off the streets and put them to work on reforestation, soil-erosion control and park development had also recently come into the state. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was just getting started.



*Conservation was in the air in 1937. The state's parks were being upgraded by the Work Projects Administration and young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps, here building a trail at Big Spring Park.*

The National Park Service was using Work Projects Administration people and the CCC in park development.

Only a few years before, the great naturalist **Aldo** Leopold had concluded his epic wildlife survey of the north-central United States, including Missouri. Now Dr. Rudolf Bennitt of the University of Missouri and his first wildlife graduate, Werner O. Nagel were working *on* their ***Survey of the Resident Game and Furbearers of Missouri***

The University of Missouri was about to get one of the new cooperative wildlife re-

search units established. This was a joint federal-state-university program at land-grant colleges to fund advanced research and wildlife study. Nine states had already set up units -Missouri's was to be the tenth.

The great drought, now in its second year, had so worsened an already bad wildlife, fisheries and forestry picture that almost everyone could see that the time was ripe for some bold new program. When Roland **Hoerr** and his hunting companions started the ball rolling, it needed only the genius of an E. Sydney Stephens to create an avalanche.